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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000236

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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJANI NATIONAL SECURITY MINISTER: FARHAD
ALIYEV MAY HAVE CONTRACTED HUSEYNOV MURDER

REF: BAKU 64

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) During a January 24 meeting with the Ambassador and C/SIMO, GOAJ Minister of National Security Mahmudov provided a status report on the investigation of the March 2, 2005 murder of journalist Elmar Huseynov. The Minister noted that initially the Prosecutor General's office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of National Security had been involved in the murder investigation. However, a criminal case had been opened in accord with the Terrorism Act, which put the MNS in the lead on the investigation. 600 people had been questioned in connection with the murder investigation. The FBI had been helpful with respect to the examination of evidence (a weapon and a hat) at the MNS' request, the Minister noted.

¶2. (C) The Minister said they had identified Tahir Gubonov and Temarez Aliyev as the two main suspects. These men had used forged documents to obtain mobile phones in Azerbaijan. They had used these phones in surveilling Elmar Huseynov. The two had rented a house 500 meters from Huseynov, and had submitted fraudulent phone numbers and addresses in doing so. They followed Huseynov for a month from home to office, using the rented phones. Phone records showed that they followed Huseynov up to the last 15 minutes of his life. The Minister said he had personally studied the investigation reports and "I am strongly confident these two are the culprits."

¶3. (C) The Minister said the investigation had confirmed that the two suspects were in Azerbaijan on the day of the murder. 30 minutes after it occurred they had taken a taxi to the bus station, where they boarded a bus for Georgia. The opposition in Azerbaijan has criticized the MNS for not pursuing the case in Georgia, but "we cannot conduct operations in foreign countries." The Minister said that he has urged his Georgian colleagues to help solve the case.

¶4. (C) According to the Minister, MNS has now learned that the two suspects are no longer in Georgia. The GOAJ has asked INTERPOL for assistance and INTERPOL is now seeking them in 186 countries through its "red line" program. He said that three other Georgians were involved in the matter and that a group of five had originally come from Georgia: the two main suspects and three others who were involved with business dealings in Azerbaijan and who stayed in the same house with the suspects. Those three are still living in Georgia and the MNS had questioned them with the help of the Georgians. The three confirmed that they came to Azerbaijan with Gubonov and Aliyev to do business here. They said Gubonov and Aliyev "used to disappear for hours, saying they were making contacts to do business," the Minister said.

¶5. (C) The three recounted that on the day of the murder, at 10 or 11 pm, Gubonov and Aliyev came back to the house, alarmed and told the other three they should leave

immediately for Georgia because "something had happened." The three were upset and protested that they had come to Azerbaijan to do business. Gubonov and Aliyev nonetheless pressed them to leave saying there was "big trouble." The five departed Azerbaijan. Based on this account, the Minister said, "we are sure Gubonov and Aliyev are the culprits -- we just need to catch them."

¶6. (C) During the trial of (former MIA official) Haji Mammedov, the Minister continued, Mammedov declared that he had been ordered to murder Huseynov by Farhad Aliyev. MNS found Haji Mammedov's phone number in Farhad Aliyev's agenda, and although Farhad Aliyev tried to hide it, had found indications that Aliyev had had a relationship with Haji Mammedov's niece and that "he was going to marry that girl," the Minister said. Farhad Aliyev met Haji Mammedov at a resort in Guba, and he came with a woman. Aliyev denies this meeting, the Minister said.

¶7. (C) The Minister noted that before becoming Minister of Economic Development, in 1994, Farhad Aliyev had been head of the Oriental Foreign Trade Board. In this position, he had a quota for oil trading. He arranged an oil trade with a Chechen who was later arrested in connection with the Haji Mammedov case. Haji Mammedov used to conduct oil trading through a Chechen connected to Aliyev. "Our investigation proved that," but Farhad Aliyev also denies this information. According to the Minister, Aliyev "confirms no fact of his contacts with Haji Mammedov although our investigation shows" that they occurred.

¶8. (C) Elmar Huseynov wrote serious critical articles in his magazine, the Minister said. Farhad Aliyev sent his brother Rafiq Aliyev to Huseynov to ask him to "stop or be punished."

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Rafiq offered to buy Huseynov's magazine and "sponsor" it in exchange for Aliyev stopping the critical articles. Huseynov reportedly replied that Farhad Aliyev should retire and he would stop writing the critical articles. The Aliyevs proposed in a second meeting to pay Huseynov \$400,00-500,00 to stop writing, the Minister said, adding that "our intelligence shows he rejected" the offer and "asked for \$2 million to stop." For this reason, he was killed. MNS has undertaken an investigation of Haji Mammedov's testimony against Farhad Aliyev. Some facts remain unclear and MNS still needs more information. "23 criminals" are involved and 19 have been put in prison because their court hearings are completed. With respect to the Huseynov murder, four are still in custody as the investigation continues.

¶9. (C) The Minister said the MNS is "hopeful it can achieve results" because "we've identified the murderers." MNS suspects that "Farhad Aliyev contracted the murder" although "we have not yet gotten complete evidence." If MNS could find the two missing Georgian criminals, more would be clear. MNS has spoken with the Georgians and sent investigators to Georgia but could not capture the two. They are now hiding in other countries, although they go to Georgia from time to time. It is difficult for the MNS to act in other countries, but the Georgians are helping -- some Azeri officers had just returned from Georgia. The Georgians "have given us much material," which MNS is now analyzing.

¶10. (C) The President has the case under his personal supervision because it is a criminal case, and "I have strict instructions to achieve a final resolution," the Minister said. "There are objective and subjective difficulties in this case but I confident we can complete it this year."

¶11. (C) Septel will report human rights activists and observers' current assessment of the Aliyev brothers' case.
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